A PRIMITIVE DYE-STUFF

BY

RENDEL HARRIS

(WOODBROOKE ESSAYS, No. 10)

CAMBRIDGE
W. HEFFER & SONS, LTD.
1927
Price Two Shillings Net

SB
286
W8
1927

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY
1962

A PRIMITIVE DYE-STUFF.

I do not know whether any adequate study has ever been made of the place of humour in literature, or in art, considered from the point of view in which it appears as the handmaid of literature. Perhaps the defect which is here suggested in scientific criticism may be due to the fact that the most learned nation in existence is the least capable of appreciating the humorous side of life, without which appreciation life itself is almost intolerable, and theology itself often reduced to a standstill. I may say in passing that my reference is not to the Scotch.

It may be admitted that no great literature is wholly devoid of a sense of humour, even if that sense may be expressed in an elephantine manner. Take Homer, for example ; he, or at least one of him, tries to make people laugh, by setting the gods laughing : he turns the graceful Hebe aside from the task of making the Olympians drink more than is good for them, in order to make room for the limping Hephaestus who inspires the company, from Zeus downwards, with unquenchable mirth to match their unquenchable thirst ; one would have thought that the merriment was as inexplicable as it was unquenchable. Does one laugh at a butler because he is lame ? Has it ever been transferred to the region of art ! That would have been an impiety from which even the Greek play-writers might have shrunk ; for it was long before they tolerated on the stage even a single drunken specimen of humanity.

And what shall we say of Polyphemus, around whom the humour of the Odyssey plays so broadly : his pitiful complaints that a wicked man named Nobody has put out his eye is certainly sportive, to the gallery at all events ; but Polyphemus in art, as Turner paints him, is sublime rather than ridiculous. One could not paint the joke, even with Hogarth to help us.

A more delicate instance of Homeric humour is in the situation

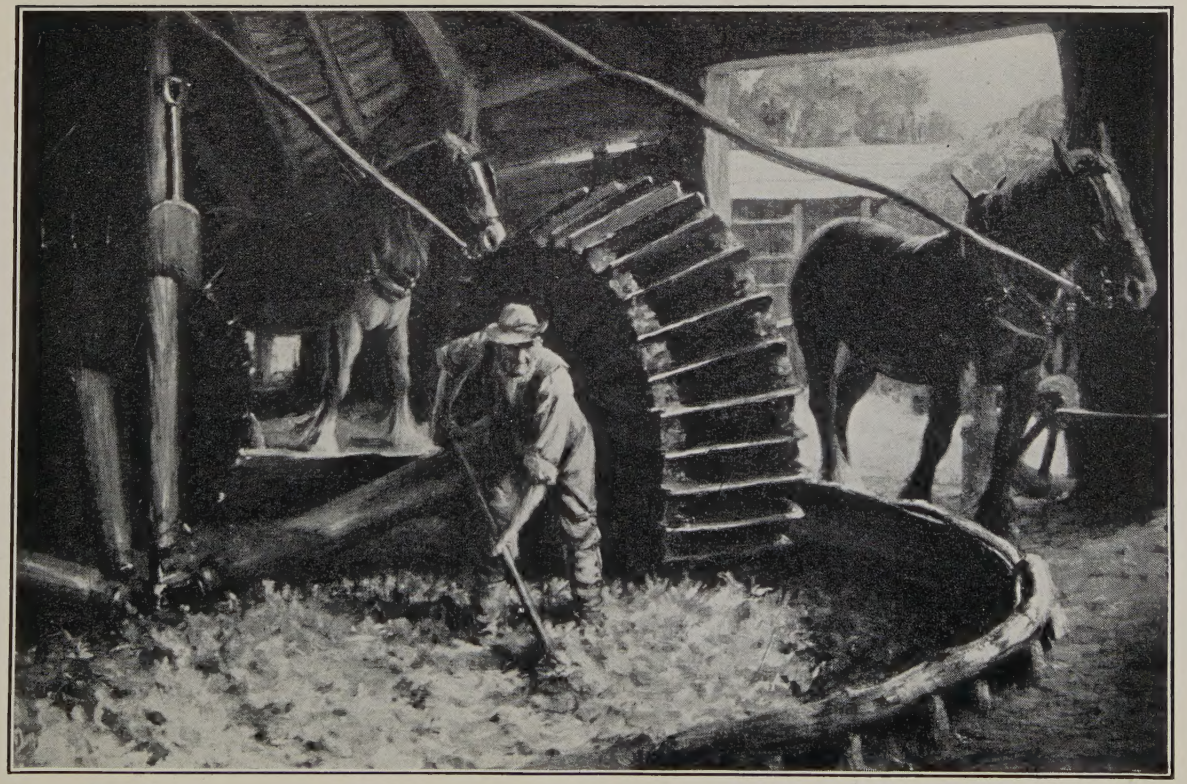
where the shipwrecked Odysseus appeals for hospitality to Queen Arētē, and the lady detects her own laundry mark on the shirt of the ship-wrecked mariner. That would make a lovely subject for a humorous artist who was also a Hellenist. We do not forget the suggestion that has been made that the original incident is due to a lady's hand, and might require a feminine interpreter.

In order to introduce my present subject I must not stray much farther into the theme of the reaction of literature upon art ; one single case shall be selected from our own National Gallery, and then farewell to By-path Meadow. Let us imagine that I am acting as guide, after the manner with which we are becoming familiar in our great galleries, to a group of students. We stop before a picture by Leslie, R.A., of which a reproduction lies before us (Plate I.). I explain to my youthful students that it is a portraiture of a scene in literature, where a widow-lady has something or some one in her eye. Upon question as to the identification of the subject from the description, an acute observer suggests that it is meant for Dido and Aeneas, treated playfully. You can see the map of the proposed New Carthage on the wall. Unfortunately there is the prohibitive clay-pipe. Another suggests that it is King Henry the Eighth, accompanied by Katharine Parr, who, as history tells us, was a widow to the power of four. Again, but with some hesitation, the pipe prohibits the identification. As no one has anything further to suggest, we turn to the Catalogue, and find that it is a representation of Widow Wadman and Uncle Toby, the scene being taken from a book which is better left unread, the *Tristram Shandy* of Laurence Sterne. Strange to say, none of the critics, nor even the author himself, as far as I know, has anything to say with regard to *Mr.* Wadman. Who was Wadman, anyway, of whom she was the relict, and who was the lady before she became a Wadman and aspired to being a Shandy ? That is the question to which I now address myself.

First of all, then, the Wadmans are amongst the oldest agricultural clans in the country, and a clan which maintained itself in comparative isolation and independence as late as the eighteenth century. The Wadman or Woadman was the person who cultivated the woad plant, which was the earliest dye-plant known in this land or perhaps in any land. The cultivation of the plant has, I suspect, almost ceased by this time ; as late as 1891 it was said to be still cultivated

Leslie Pinxit.] [*Photo : Mansell.*

PLATE I.—THE WIDOW WADMAN AND UNCLE TOBY.



Penrose Pinxit.]

PLATE II.

Penrose Pinxit.]

PLATE III.

at four centres in Lincolnshire.[1] Since then a woadmill, on the borders of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, one of the principal of the country, has been pulled down. There are two beautiful pictures of it painted by my friend Joseph Penrose before its disappearance (Plates II. and III.). One of them shows the trituration of the leaves of the woad plant into a fermenting paste by the rotating horse-mill ; the other the collection of the material into balls ready for the market and the dyer. That there were other woad farms and woad mills besides this one, which stood at Parsons Drove, not far from Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, and a little farther from Crowland Abbey, may be seen from a study of the place-names in England, especially in Lincolnshire and Somerset. For example, we shall come across a place called Wadmill, in Staffordshire, as well as a variety of places where, in consequence of the decline in cultivation of the plant, Woad or Wad has been converted to Wood ; linguistically you cannot see the Woad for the Wood. Of that more anon. We return to our statement that the Wadmans were one of the oldest agricultural clans in the country.

Those who have made a study of the development of human life from the nomadic and pastoral states to the agricultural, have pointed out that early agriculture had itself somewhat of a nomadic character. Cultivation was elementary ; a patch of fertile soil was found, utilised, and then abandoned in search of unexhausted or inexhaustible land elsewhere.

Now the curious thing about the clan of the Wadmans is that they, to a great extent, kept up the nomadic character of early agriculture. It may have been that the crops they raised were of an exhausting nature ; at all events, down to the eighteenth century they moved about, with their wives and children, from place to place, living in shanties specially erected for them or by them, and paying high rents for land which had been recently broken up. They thus constituted a kind of agricultural gypsies, and like the gypsies, no doubt, kept their clan life by intermarriage.

In confirmation of our statement as to their being, more or less, a separate clan, we may take the following reference :—

[1] There are only two growers of Woad left in the country, Mr. Thomas Booth, Woad Farm, Skirbeck, Boston; and Mr. J. L. Nussey, 19 Witham Bank, Boston. This year Mr. Nussey is not planting woad.

Marshall, in his *Review of Agriculture*, in 1811 (iii. 159), tells us that "the ordinary and established practice of cultivating and manufacturing woad in Lincolnshire, is carried on by woad-men."

Wright, in his *English Dialect Dictionary*, tells us that in Northamptonshire, "a part of Kettering field is still known by the name of *Wad-croft*, and is so described in the title-deeds. Within memory there were wad-grounds in Hardingstone field, and some of the neighbouring villages, *with huts for the woad-men*."

In the Victorian *History of Somerset* (ii. 420) we are told that the culture of woad in the eighteenth century was "mostly in the hands of *itinerant wadmen*, who, with their families, travelled from place to place, growing the *woad* on newly broken-up pasture land, for which very high rents were paid."

Mr. Booth, to whom I have referred in a previous note, tells me that the wadmen used to build themselves huts with the sods of the pasture land that they broke up; these earth buildings with earth floors were the wadmen's habitation until comparatively modern times. Mr. Booth, who has a long ancestry of woad-growers behind him, employs his own regular workmen. He tells me that in former times the wadmen used to remove their apparatus for crushing the woad when they migrated to fresh fields and pastures new.

That will be sufficient to establish the antiquity of the family into which Mrs. Wadman came on her first marriage; she had blue blood for her alliance. Before finally taking leave of her, it may be asked what clan she came from, when Mr. Wadman claimed her. We can only resort to conjecture, and yet what can be more certain than a good conjecture! We suspect that before marriage she was a Miss Flaxman, and if so, she was of an older family than her husband; the growth of flax and the manufacture of linen antedates, of necessity, the application of colour to fabric. It is to be regretted that the Flaxman has almost entirely disappeared. We have one great example in our history, the sculptor whom Blake described as "a sublime archangel, his friend and companion from all eternity; in the Divine bosom is our dwelling place." Are there any others of note? or are there any humble people, sprung from the company to which we have assigned Mrs. Wadman before marriage?

If she was not a Flaxman, perhaps she may have belonged to a later clan, the Listers. When the art of dyeing with woad became one of our leading industries, it was the custom to treat the blue dye with an alkaline or ammoniac liquor or lye, which changed the blue into a vivid green, known to the ancients as Lincoln Green, such as Robin Hood and his men wore in the recesses of Sherwood Forest, to make themselves the more like to trees walking. The Lye-men or Lysters were also a guild or clan, nor have they wholly disappeared, though they are now to be sought for in the ranks of medicine (*clarum et venerabile nomen*).

Coming now to the woad-plant and its use as a blue dye (convertible at need into a green dye), we are already well on our way to establishing the antiquity of its culture by what we have said about Robin Hood and his merry men. If we now turn to Cæsar and his Gallic Wars, we shall find that he has somewhat to say about the use which the ancient Britons made of the blue dye obtained from the woad-plant.

> "With most of the inland tribes, the cultivation of corn disappears, and a pastoral form of life succeeds, flesh and milk forming the principal diet, and skins of animals the dress. On the other hand, the Britons all agree in dyeing their bodies with woad, a substance that yields a bluish pigment, and in battle greatly increases the wildness of their look."—CÆSAR, B.G., v. 14 (tr. Long).

You will observe that Cæsar is not really an authority for the painted condition of our ancestors : he never saw one of such decorated and undressed specimens. The Britons whom he met were of the cultured and well-dressed variety, on his own showing not a whit inferior to the Gauls of the continent, capable perhaps of a higher civilisation, as the events showed, but so readily receptive of it that they could not have been far inferior to it.

Mr. Arthur Weigall has done good service in the little volume on *Wanderings in Roman Britain*, in which he dispels so effectively the slanders, which Cæsar picked up from his hasty visits to Britain, the basis of which may, perhaps, have been nothing more dreadful than the fact that the British knew how to use the woad-plant for dyeing. One wonders what Cæsar would have said of the inhabitants

of the town of Frome in the beginning of the nineteenth century, who were "dyed purple with the manufacture of blue cloths." [1]

Let us see if we can apply modern methods of criticism to Cæsar's reports, which passed unchallenged, and with expansions, into the writings of other Latin authors.[2]

In the year 1874 there appeared a little volume from which I propose to make an extract bearing on the state of culture of our ancestors in pre-Roman times ; it runs as follows :—

> "In the winter they used to wrap themselves up in the skins of the beasts they could shoot with their bows and arrows. In the summer they were naked, and instead of clothes they put paint upon their bodies. They were very fond of a fine blue colour, made out of a plant called Woad, which they found in their woods. They squeezed out the juice of the woad, and then stained themselves all over with it, so that in summer they looked as if they were dressed in light blue clothes." [3]

It must be quite clear, even to a superficial criticism, that we have in this passage the key to the source from which Cæsar derived his information. We are all of us familiar with the passage ; I mean those who had the good fortune to be born later than 1874. Is it not written in *Little Arthur's History of England?* We are led then to conclude a common source for the statements made in common by Cæsar and Little Arthur ; we may call this common source Q, and say of it, that Q, in spite of his evident antiquity, is a person of no historic credibility.

It is now time to pass on to more trustworthy observations such as are furnished by the botanist for the plant which we are discussing and by the philologist for the names which it bears.

In the first place we have to discuss whether the *wad* or *woad* plant is a native of the British Isles. It will be remembered that our source Q affirms that the ancient Britons found it in the woods ; we have already dismissed this writer as incredibly imaginative. As Browning would say "he puts blue into his line." The botanists tell us, however, that it is a product of the South-east of Europe. There

[1] *Tour in the West of England in* 1808, p. 32.

[2] According to Pliny (H.N., xxii. 1, 2), it was the *women* who were painted and undrest, but it was only at sacred festivals!

[3] *Little Arthur's History of England*, p. 2.

PLATE IV.

is a slight reserve in some quarters as to the possibility of its being found in an untilled state ; it is agreed, however, to call it by the name of

Isatis tinctoria,
of the *Dyer's Isatis ;*

and this takes us back at once to the Greek botanists, who knew the plant and its uses. Except in Britain it was for many centuries unknown in the West, until France and Germany discovered the value of the dye and imported both plant and dye from England.[1] Great quantities of woad are, even at the present day, produced and exported from Toulouse area ; and although its use has declined in Germany, it is still cultivated in the neighbourhood of Erfurt and in Thuringia generally, in spite of the encroachment of imported indigo and the discovery of the chemical dyes which displace it.

If you were to look at the early English herbals, such as the famous one of Gerarde (Plate IV.), you would find that their descriptions go back to Greek and Latin sources, and that they copy from Dioscorides and Pliny. This is what Gerarde says about it :

> . . . The tame or garden Woade groweth in fertile fields where it is sowen. . . . The wilde kind groweth where the tame kind hath been sowen. . . . Woade is called in Greek and Latin *Isatis* and *Glastum*. Cæsar in his first [fifth] book of the French wars, saith that all the Britons do colour themselves with Woad, which giveth a blew colour ; the which thing also Pliny in his 22 book, chap. 1, doth testifie ; in France they call it *Glastum*. *Woad*, which is like unto Plantaine, wherewith the Britons wives and their sonnes wives are coloured all over and go naked in some kinds of sacrifices. It is likewise called of some *Guadum :* of the Italians *Guado*, a word as it seemeth, wrung out of the word *Glastum ;* in Spanish and in France *Pastel* : in Dutch *Weet :* in English *Woad* and *Wade*."

It would be interesting to trace these statements of Gerarde to their originals ; for instance, when he talks of the "tame or garden woade," that is an attempt to translate the Greek of Dioscorides, who calls it ἥμερος, and when he says it is *plantagini simile*, like a

[1] The *Encycl. Brit.*, s.v. Indigo, says that "up to the middle of the seventeenth century it was the only blue dye-stuff used by dyers in England and *on the adjoining continent ;*" the last words are English as she is felt !

Plantaine, that goes back to ἀρνογλώσσῳ ἐμφερές of Dioscorides and Pliny. Pliny also is responsible for the barbarism of the British ladies.

What we have first to notice, however, is that Gerarde, who was able to trace a cultivated and a wild variety in Greece, says that it is not found in a wild state in Britain, except where there has been a previous sowing. The plant had been acclimatised ; it had come from South Eastern Europe, as a dyer's speciality. It is important to notice this, because some modern botanists, relying upon the fact that woad had been found growing wild on the banks of the Severn, near Tewkesbury, have assumed the plant to be indigenous. If, however, it is an importation from S.E. Europe or the Levant, there must have been a people acquainted with the dyer's art, who had given instruction to our ancestors as to the plant and its uses. This brings us to an important problem, one of the unsolved and apparently insoluble riddles of language ; as far as its British name goes, there does not seem to be the remotest connection between the British name *woad*, and the *Isatis* of the Greeks, or the *vitrum* or *glastum* of the Latins.

We will first give an illustration of the plant itself, as it grows wild (Plate V.), from Sibthorpe, *Flora Graeca* and then we will address ourselves to the problems raised by its various appellations : that is, we must now leave the science of botany and turn to the science of philology.

All science is occupied with the task of bringing into relation with one another things that appear to be unrelated ; monkeys, for instance, and men. It is, however, in the science of philology that the greatest skill has been shown in bridging the gulfs that lie between apparently unrelated words. How surprised, for instance, the beginner is when he is told that the domestic *goose* is the same word as the Latin *anser*, or that a *bishop* is the same thing as the French *évêque*, or that *hemp* is the same as *cannabis ;* why, they have not a letter in common. There is nothing the philologer loves better than to trace the connection between a pair of such forms, and to dispel the obscurity involved in their equivalence.

We have, then, to try and dispel the particular obscurity in the relation of the British *woad* to the Greek *Isatis* or the Latin *vitrum*, if that is the same thing. Let us see if we can find out the way in which the philologer will go to work, when we throw down the forms before him. The probability is that he will begin by saying that the

PLATE V.

original name of the plant had an initial *w*, as shown in *wad* and in *vitrum*. That causes no difficulty, because the Greek language in its early days had a *w* of its own, which they called a *digamma*, and which dropped out of use, though scholars were able to show that it was constantly employed by Homer. So we must rewrite *Isatis* in the form *Wisatis* (*Fισατις*). Are we now any nearer to the original form? Not much, but now let us go back to our early British form, known as *Wad* or *Woad*. If we set down, side by side, some of the North European forms which are undoubtedly closely related to our *Wad*, or actually derived from it, we should find that the old French form, which answers to the modern *guède* was *waide* or *waisde*. Notice the existence of a sibilant letter along with the dental; this suggests that a letter has been dropped from *Wad*: it should be *Wads* or *Wasd*. The same thing occurs in mediæval Latin where the plant is called *Guesdum*: (see Ducange-Henschel *ad voc.* Glastum). This letter, which we propose to restore, is already in the Greek *Isatis* or *Wisatis*: we see the forms are drawing together.

Here is a rough tabulation of the forms :—

English.	*Dutch.*	*German.*	*French.*	*Latin.*	*Greek.*
Woad	Weed	Waid	Waisde	Vitrum	
Wad			Waide	and	Isatis
(Wad-worth			Guède	Guesdum	
Wads-worth)					
cf. Watchurst (personal name) (Times, Jul. 26) and Wadhurst (Sussex) and (Kent)				Witsatis (*Fιτσάτις*) | Watchet.	

But then the Greek has also lost a dental, which is preserved in British and in Latin. So we must assume a primitive

Witsatis or *Widsatis*,

from which the other forms are to be derived. That was as far as the philologers could get; they registered the form (some people will say created it), and marked it as a lost and unknown vocable. "We must admit," says Boisacq, "that we have a series of independent loans from an unknown form." At this point I propose to take up the enquiry, only making a slight change in the suggested form. The first vowel in the restored form must be *a*, which occurs in the strongest

form in *Wad;* so we are to go in search of a lost word, which the Greeks took over in the form

Wadsatis or *Watsatis.*

We are going to show that this is an Egyptian word describing either the plant itself, or at least the colour of the plant. Suppose we transcribe some words from Budge's *Vocabulary to the Theban Recension of the Book of the Dead:* we have as follows :—

uatch = watch = tablet of *green* faience.
watch = unguent, *sulphate of copper*, eye-paint.
watchu = *sulphate of copper.*
watch = to make to flourish, be *green*, etc.
watchet = *green, green things*, etc.
watch-ur = *Great Green Sea ; i.e.*, the Mediterranean.

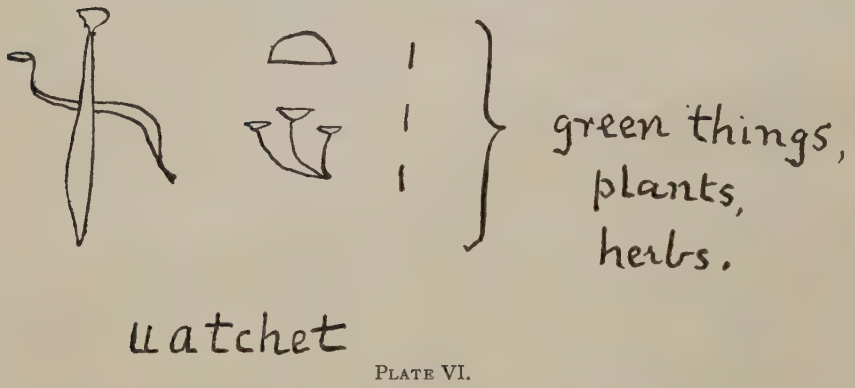


PLATE VI.

It is clear that the Egyptian word *watch* answers to *blue* or *green ;* it corresponds, nearly, to the Greek *Glaucus.* If it describes plants it is *green*, if metallic substances, *blue ;* if the sea, it may mean either the one or the other.

If we look at the hieroglyphic signs which Budge has here transcribed, we find that there is one peculiar Egyptian letter, which looks like a snake and is transcribed in English letters by the three letters *tch.* It was a peculiarly Egyptian sound (preserved to this day in Coptic), which neighbouring peoples were unable to express. For instance, when it had to be transferred to Hebrew, it became *ts* or *z :* what it became in Greek was a variation of the forms which turn up in Hebrew : it might be *t* or *s*, or a combination of the two.

We suggest, then, that it is this *letter* which has been making the

trouble, and that the lost root, which we wrote down as *Watsatis*, in accordance with the instructions of the philological experts, was really

Watchatis,

in which we see the Egyptian *Watchet* clearly standing out.

The Woad plant is, then, an Egyptian importation, and has a name expressing the colour for which it is valued.

THE WOAD ELEMENT IN PLACE-NAMES AND PERSONAL NAMES.

We now come to examine the evidence for the culture of woad in ancient times in the British Isles which is afforded by (*a*) Place Names, (*b*) Personal Names derived from Place Names, (*c*) Personal Names of an independent character. Under the first head we have such names as Wadbury or Wadsworth, in which latter case, as we have pointed out, the sibilant *S* is not, as one might at first assume, the mark of the possessive ; under the second head we have the personal Wadsworth, from which the better-known Wordsworth is derived ; if the poet had known the origin of his name, he would certainly have apostrophised the *Isatis tinctoria* in place of the *Lesser Celandine*. The third group is headed by our lady friend the Widow Wadman, with whom we commenced the present investigation. Under each head we must keep on the lookout for collateral forms, where Wad or Woad has been eclipsed by the easier Wood, or where a primitive Watch has lost its first meaning. Further, we should pay special attention to forms which occur in districts like Somerset or Lincolnshire, where the cultivation of woad has been extensively carried on. We may illustrate the enquiry by taking one or two specimen cases.

We alluded above to the name Wadbury, which is the equivalent of Woad Hill. It lies in Somerset somewhat to the N.W. of Frome, where in the eighteenth century the population was so conspicuous for their "dyer's hand." Wadbury is certainly the mark of local Woad-cultivation. If, however, we concede this, what are we to say of Wadborough in Worcestershire ? or of Watchbury in Warwickshire ? Is this last merely a look-out station ? Even more striking is the fact that not very far from Wadbury in Somerset we come to Glastonbury. We recall that the late Latin name for Woad is Glastum. Much has been written and much speculated about the

name of the famous Abbey. It has been connected with the Keltic *glas* which means *green ;* but it has also a Keltic bye-form *ynyswtryn,* which seems to be made up of *ynys* = island, and the Latin *vitrum* which may mean either *glass* or *woad.* If we take the second Latin form, we are very nearly on the track of the form *Glastum-bury.* Did they really cultivate the *wad* plant in this district ? The answer is that the Abbots of Glastonbury derived large revenues from its cultivation.

The Victoria County History of Somerset (p. 420) reminds us in fact that one of the chief agricultural products of the county in the past was woad, "of which there was a great quantity belonging to the Abbey of Muchelney, *as well as to the Abbot of Glastonbury.*"

We need not, therefore, any longer doubt as to the real meaning of this much disputed place-name.

The discrimination of names which have alternative forms involving *wood* is more difficult. Take, for instance, the not-uncommon Woodhurst ; we should hardly venture to correct it, if we did not find the alternative Wadhurst in Sussex, where it must be allowed to stand, unless an earlier form can be put in evidence. It occurs also in Kent near Maidstone. All of such forms need a historical investigation. An interesting case of the transfer of a Somerset place-name to a personal name will be found in the case of Nicholas Wadham, the founder of one of the less conspicuous Oxford Colleges (Plate VII.). There can be no doubt that *Wadham* is originally a place-name, intimating a *ham* or *hame* where *woad* was produced. With equal certainty we have the personal name derived from the place-name, the remote ancestor of the worthy Nicholas at the end of the sixteenth century being one Nicholas de Wadham, or some similar name. At the time of the foundation of the Oxford College, he was known as Nicholas Wadham of Merrifield, and Fuller says in his *Worthies of England,* that he had "great length in his extraction, breadth in his estate, and depth in his liberality." Merrifield, where the Wadhams lived, seems to have disappeared ; but the evidence for its location places it some miles north of Ilminster. So we are in Somerset again ; how far off the original Wadham was from the modern Ilminster remains to be determined. As his wealth appears to have been adequate, we may conjecture that it was not wholly detached from the production of woad.

Plate VII.

Plate VIII.—Dunster Village and Castle with Yarn Market

What are we to say if we find a form Wodeton ; is it anything more than a farm or enclosure by a wood ? In the S.W. corner of Somersetshire, in the neighbourhood of Dunster (Plate VIII.), we find in the thirteenth century a reference to a Wodeton. In Maxwell Lyte's book, *The Honour of Dunster* (p. 36), we find amongst the signatories to a release by the Lord of Dunster a person who describes himself as

Adam de Wdeton, Miles.

As it is precisely in the Dunster area that we find special evidence for the cultivation of woad, we have no hesitation in saying that it was not a *Wood-town* that was meant. Maxwell Lyte points out (p. 298) that the *Dunster Court Rolls* of the fifteenth century contain several references to the pollution of the river there with woad-water.

As Wodetown naturally becomes Wootton, we may find that the soldier came from Wilts ; and not a few towns which bear the name of Wootton may find a new interpretation.

We have already pointed out that in Northamptonshire the name of Wadcroft is still extant in the Kettering area, and is certainly not to be corrected to Woodcroft.

We showed above that *Wad* or *Woad* was a worn-down form from an original *Wads* or *Watch*. This helps us to see the meaning of names occurring in pairs, like *Wadworth* or *Wadsworth* in Yorkshire, or *Wadmill* in Staffordshire compared with *Wadesmill* in Hertfordshire. They are evidently the same name in either case, and no personal factor, no ancestor of General Wade or any of his kin, is involved. The discrimination of meanings is not easy ; for instance, *Wadswell* in Wilts looks personal, but *Wadswick* in the same county seems to look in the other direction.

We come now to the most important point in all our enquiry. It will be remembered that, with the aid of philological experts, we found that the original name of the woad-plant in Europe was something like *witsatis* or *watsatis ;* and we connected this name, which was admitted to be an intruder from some other country, with the Egyptian forms *watch* or *watchet,* denoting a plant or a colour that might be blue or green, with a probable preference for green. We could hardly avoid the enquiry whether there was a similar colour word in early British use ; and if so, whether directly or through the plant from which the colour was obtained, there was a re-action of

the colour upon the place-names existing at present or extant in earlier times.

First of all, then, we have the old English *Watchet* to describe a blue substance or fabric. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that it usually denotes a "light blue colour." It translates *glaucus* in Holland's Pliny. But sometimes it is used to denote a green or greenish colour. A good instance is given from *Swan*, Spec. V. (1643), "Instead of a blew (comets are sometimes) of a watchet or greenish colour:" also in *Cleveland*, Poems (1659), 161, "Tethys in a gown of sea-green watchet." We see that *watchet* varies between blue and green, and sometimes, like the sea, changes from one to the other. As for Thetis' gown, since it is described in terms of a known and recognisable fabric, it is clearly a dyed fabric, and no other dye in that day was on hand to express the colour except *woad*. Woad, then, was *watchet* in the seventeenth century.

Here is another illustration of the same point. When Mary, Queen of Scots, was preparing herself for execution, she made the best show in appearance and apparel that a lady of the time could present. A special false wig, for instance, which came off in the hands of the hangman! Yes! but she had also put on an extra pair of stockings, an ordinary pair beneath, an exhibition pair above. "Then did she apparel herself after this manner . . . her stockings of worsted watchet, clocked and edged at the top with silver, and under them a pair of white."[1]

Evidently the stockings were dyed, and the colour represents the dye, indirectly suggesting the plant from which the colour was derived.

The evidence of the language, therefore, is to the effect that the woad plant had originally an Egyptian name: and since we have seen no reason to believe that it was indigenous in this island, but every reason for believing that it came from the far end of the Mediterranean, we are justified in saying that it came to our shores from Egypt.

We come finally to the question of the interpretation of a place-name in Somersetshire, of great antiquity, which agrees in form with the watchet colour or the equivalent woad-plant. The town of

[1] See Maud and C. H. B. Quennel, *A History of Everyday Things in England*, ii., p. 19, from letters of Lady Bryan.

Plate IX.—Watchet: The Harbour.

Watchet was in the old days one of the principal sea-ports in the county, and actually had the name among the Saxons of *Wecedport*. It was more than once ravaged by the Danish privateers, who in 988 A.D. made a descent upon the town, and who repeated the onslaught nine years later, when they ravaged the coast of the British Channel from the Land's End to the Severn. There was, says the Saxon Chronicle, "great evil in burning and man-slaying." Shortly after these invasions, we find the name of Watchet attached to the place, which need not be very different in pronunciation from the Saxon spelling, and may be the earlier form. What, then, is the meaning of the name? Up to the present time it has been the fashion to compare it with Datchet on the Thames, and to explain the latter as *Dacca's Cot*, or some such form. In that case, we should have to find another *cot* for a similar *Wacca* or whatever you like: but I imagine no one who has studied the foregoing investigation will endorse this specimen of place-namer's ingenuity. It must have something to do with woad; for, as we have seen, Watchet is right in the focus of the woad cultivation, and its neighbouring town, Dunster, was in evidence for the pollution of its stream by the cultivators or the dyers in the fifteenth century. We need not go so far as to say with Collinson in his history of the county, that Somerset is the original home of the woad industry; it is quite clear that it was principal if not original. Similar trouble over the pollution of streams by dyers or wadmen may be seen from the regulations at Winchester in the middle of the reign of Henry V: "between sunrise and sunset no *wodgor* should be thrown into the King's brook." *Wodgor* or *wad-gore* means the *waste* or *filth* of the woad. That makes it fairly clear that Watchet has something to do with woad; and as we have shown the Egyptian origin of the famous dye, which appears to have been brought here by Egyptian merchants, and its use taught here by Egyptian artisans, we may say that we have found an Egyptian place-name and a corresponding Egyptian settlement on the coast of Somerset. The result is surprising, but it need not be much more surprising than the fact, to which we referred above, that the Danes brought their ships round the Land's End and as far as the Severn. What the Danish robbers could do, the civilised Egyptian traders were also capable of attempting. Perhaps, then, we have shed a ray of light on the prehistoric civilisation of the British Isles.

DID THE EGYPTIANS USE WOAD?

That the Egyptians were skilled in the art of dyeing must be conceded by anyone who will take pains to examine the fabrics, especially the mummy-cloths, that have come down to us out of the earliest dynasties. These show a variety of dye-stuffs, and in Carter and Newberry's *Tomb of Thoutmosis IV.*[1] we have reproductions in colours ranging from red, blue, green, yellow, brown or black to grey. The writers do not attempt, as it seems, to identify the separate dyes. In Flinders Petrie's *Descriptive Sociology*, however, published in 1925, we find in the section on the "Ancient Egyptians" references to safflower, indigo, and doubtless madder for red dye. This appears to claim indigo as the basis of Egyptian blue. To the same effect the statement is made in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. Dyeing, that the Egyptians used *indigo* and *madder* for their principal dyes. Here is the passage :—

"Eventually the Egyptians themselves began to practise the arts of dyeing and printing, utilising, no doubt, both the knowledge and materials derived from India. Pliny the historian has left us a brief record of the methods employed in Egypt during the first century, as well as of the Tyrian purple dye celebrated already in 1000 B.C., while the chemical examination of mummy cloths by Thomson and Schunck testifies to the use by the Egyptian dyers of *indigo* and *madder*."

Here we have again the supposition that Egyptian blue means indigo ; the proof, however, is insufficient. The discovery of indigo by experiment on the wrappings of mummies does not exclude woad, which is chemically not to be distinguished from indigo, even if the percentage of indigo in the woad-plant is so much smaller than that of the Indian plant. Would it not have been more correct to say that the Egyptian dyes were madder and woad or indigo ? And if the Indian dye reached the Mediterranean at an early date, would not the Greeks have called it Indikon (Ἰνδικόν) rather than *Isatis ?*

[1] Published by Constable in 1904.

APPENDIX.

If there is any correct induction in the previous enquiry, we shall at once be challenged to go farther with the matter, and shall, almost certainly, fare worse. You cannot introduce an Egyptian hieroglyph to the prehistoric map of England, without the root spreading and multiplying. We shall be asked at once if there are not other traces of Egyptian nomenclature to be found, say on the English Channel, which must have been traversed long before the Bristol Channel was discovered or attempted. Can Somersetshire be thought of, and the southern coast of England be neglected? Evidently we are going to be led into temptation, and into philological traps and snares from which it will be hard to escape. We will, therefore, only make one or two enquiries, for those to answer who have more Keltic resources than ourselves, and not less Egyptian.

What is the origin of the word Tamar, applied to the river which discharges itself into the most beautiful harbour in the island? The Keltic scholars have suggested that it is an old-Irish formation and means Blackwater; but they are clearly not satisfied with the result. That it is, however, a water-name may be suspected from the occurrence of the name again in Galicia as the name of a river. That suggests Kelt-Iberian, if a satisfactory explanation can be found. On the other hand the Egyptologists will tell us that *Ta-Meri* is the name for Egypt, and that it means the *Land of the Inundation*, or, as we should say, *Waterland;* a very proper name for the country which lives by its water and its overflow. Is it possible, then, that Tamar is not Keltic at all, but that it is an Egyptian survival? Would it not be a better etymology than to call it a *Blackwater* which it certainly is not? We leave that question for solution. The contradiction should be easy, if we are on a wrong track.

An equally venturesome suggestion comes to our mind with regard to the Isle of Wight, which we know by its Roman name of Vectis, and its earlier Greek name of Ἶκτις (*i.e.* *Fίκτις*, from Timæus), and is, therefore, out of reach of Anglo-Saxon philology. The Keltic scholars are again in perplexity, and content themselves with the collection of literary quotations and doubtful suggestions as to whether Vectis, to which the British brought their tin-ingots, may not be St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall, rather than the Isle of Wight.

Is it possible that we have here also an Egyptian survival, and that the name is cognate with Watchet and Witsatis, and means the sea-green or blue-green island ? We leave that suggestion also for the consideration of the learned. If we were to go further in speculation, we should imperil the previous results obtained in this Essay : it is sufficient to say that these concluding remarks have no necessary connection with the arguments that precede, and may be detached from them, if thought proper.

NOTES OF A VISIT TO THE ONE WOAD-FARM REMAINING IN ENGLAND.

BY

RENDEL HARRIS AND HELEN T. SHERLOCK.

On August 18th, 1927, we visited Mr. Tom Booth, at The Woad Farm, Skirbeck, Boston, Lincs.

Mr. Booth is descended from woadmen on his mother's side. The farm belonged originally to his uncle, Mr. Greaves, a prosperous woad grower, who had often, as a baby, been rocked to sleep in a woad basket. At that time the woadmen moved about, never staying longer than three years in one place. They chose good pasture land such as is used for raising bullocks, and taking up the sods, built turf huts. They set up their mills and their frames, and lived on the land for three years.

Mr. Booth told us about the woad :—

that it is pronounced 'Wod' ;

that only the leaves are used for the dye ;

that only leaves of first year plants are of use ;

that the plant does not flower the first year ;

that the plants are grown a second year for the seed, and they are so prolific that only a very small patch need be kept for seeding ;

that the second year the flowers grow up very tall ;

that it needs a good but light soil ;

that it exhausts the soil ; the roots are so strong that you can hear them crack against the plough ;

that the best crop to follow woad is corn ;

that wheat that succeeds a woad crop is a peculiarly deep golden colour : looking at such a field you can tell to the inch where the woad has been ;

that sheep thrive splendidly on the stalks that remain when the woad has been gathered, or on plants of the third year.

We had the pleasure of actually seeing the woad crushed and prepared for the market.

The woad was cut by women and girls, carted to the farm, and ground straight away.

The mill, worked by an engine, consisted of three large revolving wheels that described a circle, and two running flanges, one on the outer and one on the inner rim of the wheel track that kept the woad in place. The leaves were piled within the circle and pitched under the wheels a little at a time by two men who then brushed all stray leaves on to the track.

The crushed woad was put into two wooden vats. A pipe carried away any juice that ran out, as this is not of use.

The next day the woad was made into balls by hand ; and these balls were laid out on racks where they would stay until the following December. Then all the woad would be packed into casks and sent to Leeds, where it passes into the hands of the dye-merchant and the dyer.

The Government still insists on certain cloth for its use being dyed with woad—hence the order from the firm in Leeds.

We brought away a botanical specimen for further study.

Mr. Booth said that a good deal of flax used to be grown near Spalding. We ourselves saw flax growing between Boston and Skegness, and again in Norfolk.

ABERDEEN: THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500
All items are subject to recall.